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AS THEY GROW IN NUMBER, SWAT TEAMS ARE UNDER ATTACK FOR THEIR INVASIVE TACTICS AND CLOSE LINKS TO THE MILITARY. BUT DEFENDERS SAY THEY'RE ESSENTIAL IN TODAY'S VIOLENT WORLD.

Sixty-four-year-old Mario Paz and six other members of his family were asleep in their home in Compton, Calif., when attackers stormed the house at 11 p.m. on Aug. 9. The 20 invaders, dressed in black, burst into the house after shooting up the front- and backdoor locks. They quickly seized \$11,000 in cash and four guns--three pistols and a .22-caliber rifle. One of the attackers shot Paz twice in the back, leaving him dead in his bedroom. Another slapped a pair of handcuffs on Paz's wife, who was wearing nothing but panties and a towel, and escorted her outside. "It was like war," neighbor Luz Escamilla said.

Was this a violent armed robbery? No, it was a "high-risk entry" drug raid, conducted by members of a police Special Weapons and Tactics team as part of a narcotics investigation of one of Paz's neighbors, whose house had also recently been stormed. Police said they suspected Paz's house was being used as a drug mail drop. But here's where things get a bit curious. The raid in Compton was executed by a SWAT team from a city 25 miles away--the city of El Monte, Calif. And Paz, who had no criminal record, was not listed on the search warrant. As it turned out, the SWAT team found no drugs in Paz's house. And no members of the Paz family were charged with any crimes.

The Compton incident, although nightmarish, is far from unique. Around the country, local SWAT teams are coming under fire, as critics from both the left and the right question whether something needs to be done to rein in the elite units.

Not the least of the concerns is the sheer number of such units. El Monte, for example, is a Los Angeles County community of 111,000 people; the county has its own sizable SWAT team, as does the nearby city of Los Angeles. Does El Monte really need a SWAT team? Should it be launching raids in another jurisdiction 25 miles away? And how well-trained is the El Monte squad?

Civil rights and civil liberties groups are increasingly challenging the growing firepower and violent tactics of these often-secretive police units. Civil libertarians accuse special-operations units of engaging in paramilitary tactics that often slight, or violate outright, citizens' civil rights. They also fear that SWATs--which increasingly buy and receive equipment, weaponry, and training from the Pentagon--are eroding the nation's vaunted separation between domestic law enforcement and the military. In fairness, it should be noted that

SWATs are not taking these steps on their own: Their closer ties with the Pentagon are a direct result of legislation passed by Congress in the early 1990s.

Whether SWAT teams are truly effective is another worrisome question. Some experts feel that SWATs escalate rather than defuse the high-risk situations for which they were designed. Nearly 50 officers--most of them SWAT-trained--poured into Columbine High School in Littleton, Colo., last spring, yet they could not prevent the deaths of 13 people at the hands of two adolescent killers.

Experts, and even police themselves, worry about the expanding numbers and kinds of missions that SWAT teams have been asked to take on. No longer do they respond merely to hostage and barricade situations. SWAT teams now serve search warrants, go on drug raids, help in riot control, and, in some jurisdictions, are even called out to deal with domestic disputes and vicious dogs.

Certainly SWAT teams have their advocates--many of them. Defenders insist that today's well-armed criminal element warrants special tactics and weaponry and that in highly volatile situations, SWAT teams help preserve the safety of the public, police, and even criminals. They point out that a SWAT team's overwhelming show of force often ensures that no shots are fired. Police and law enforcement experts say the rise in violent drug-related crimes and the threat of international terrorism alone justify having SWAT teams ready to go.

Not surprisingly, police looking back at Columbine and other recent school shootings disagree with the critics. To them, those incidents reconfirmed the need for SWAT teams--especially in suburban police departments. "School violence and post office violence warrant the creation of SWAT teams in smaller jurisdictions," says Ron McCarthy, a nationally recognized special weapons and tactics trainer and consultant and former member of the Los Angeles City SWAT team.

But the victims of SWAT team drug raids gone wrong, like the one in California, are increasingly apt to sue the police for damages. And state and federal politicians are taking a hard look at SWAT missions.

In December, the Columbine Review Commission, appointed by Colorado Gov. Bill Owens, a Republican, started reviewing the SWAT performance in Littleton. The Seattle police department's SWAT team is about to undergo review for its role in the riots at the World Trade Organization meetings in that city last month. And the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights will soon be the third agency to investigate the Compton raid on the Paz household; the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department and the FBI have already begun inquiries.

HISTORY AND SCOPE

SWAT teams were born in the 1960s, during growing civil unrest and escalating

urban violence. Initially designed to respond to situations that involved hostage-takers and barricaded suspects, they were soon playing roles in combating political groups that advocated violence, such as the Black Panthers and the Symbionese Liberation Army. SWAT historians also cite the University of Texas tower shooting as another catalyst. In 1966, Charles Whitman barricaded himself in the observation deck atop the university's tower and opened fire on faculty and students below. By the time Austin police officers could reach him, he had shot 46 people. Seventeen died, including the sniper. "We didn't have the sophisticated equipment or training to deal with him," said Sgt. William Horn of the Austin police department. "Citizens had to volunteer their own rifles."

Thirty years later, not only the number, but the size and scope of SWAT teams have grown significantly. Among police departments serving communities of 50,000 people or more, the percentage with SWAT units jumped from 59 percent in 1982 to 89 percent in 1995, according to a survey by Peter Kraska, professor of police studies at Eastern Kentucky University, in his 1997 report, "Militarizing American Police: The Rise and Normalization of Paramilitary Units."

The number of SWAT units in smaller agencies (those serving 25,000 to 50,000 people) has been growing even faster in recent years--from 121 in 1985 to 311 in 1995, Kraska reported.

Some police experts dispute Kraska's figures, but even they acknowledge that a majority of medium- to large-size police departments now have SWAT units. Of the 2,027 police agencies that have 50 or more sworn officers, 1,176--or 58 percent--either have a SWAT unit or belong to a multijurisdictional SWAT team, says Larry Glick, director of the National Tactical Officers Association, a 16-year-old organization that provides training and resources to state and local SWATs. (The NTOA has 4,500 member agencies.) The differences between Kraska's results and Glick's arise from the surveys' sampling methods. Kraska looked at departments with at least 100 officers, the NTOA considered all those with more than 50. The NTOA is midway through a nationwide SWAT team study sponsored by the National Institute of Justice, the research agency of the U.S. Department of Justice.

Apart from the rapid growth in their numbers, SWAT teams are also expanding their daily law enforcement responsibilities beyond the occasional hostage or barricade situation. According to Kraska, the number of SWAT team call-outs jumped from 3,000 in 1980 to 35,000 in 1996--more than an elevenfold increase. That growth coincides almost exactly with the nation's increasingly expensive two-decade-long war on drugs. Urban and suburban SWAT teams are now used as proactive forces, seeking evidence by carrying out searches based on no-knock search warrants. In 1995, more than 75 percent of SWAT call-outs from larger-size departments involved "high-risk drug warrant work," Kraska says. And 81 percent of the units in small- to medium-size departments also now execute warrants. "The original mission of SWAT teams has changed," says Glick.

What exactly is a "high-risk" warrant? Three things define "high risk," explains David Klinger, an associate professor of criminology and criminal justice at the University of Missouri (St. Louis) and principal researcher in the NTOA's study. SWAT teams should step in to deliver warrants if 1) The suspect has a propensity toward violence; 2) the police know that a high number of weapons or particularly lethal weapons are present; or 3) the location is heavily fortified.

Critics say SWAT teams are engaging in far more missions than they should and fear the teams will transition from reactive response work to proactive patrolling. "There's been a lot of perversion of the original intent of SWATs, which was to save lives," says Joseph McNamara, a research fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace and a former police chief of San Jose, Calif. "Today's SWAT teams conduct drug raids. And the magnitude of force they're using endangers innocent suspects," McNamara says. "Incrementally, the drug war has changed the police into a much more militaristic entity. The fact that SWAT teams carry out drug raids reflects the new military mind-set."

McNamara said an NTOA conference he recently attended had confirmed his fears that SWAT teams are becoming more like military warriors than peace officers. "Officers at the conference were wearing these very disturbing shirts," he said. "On the front, there were pictures of SWAT officers dressed in dark uniforms, wearing helmets, and holding submachine guns. Below was written: 'We don't do drive-by shootings.' On the back, there was a picture of a demolished house. Below was written: 'We stop.'"

Nor is McNamara wrong to fear that SWAT teams are becoming part of daily police work. The SWAT team in Fresno, Calif., a city of 400,000, has received national attention for its military-style tactics.

The squad, called the Violent Crime Suppression Unit, was established in 1995 when constant nightly violence was plaguing some of the city's neighborhoods. "There were 36 gang-related shootings in six months in one area of town," says Lt. John Fries, a department spokesman and former SWAT team member. So the department reorganized its SWAT team and created the VCSU, a full-time, heavily armed, SWAT-type team assigned to patrol neighborhoods every night. (The regular SWAT team is now part-time and handles only barricade and hostage situations.)

The VCSU's 23 members have access to an armored personnel carrier donated by the military; night-vision goggles; and three helicopters with people-detecting heat sensors. Officers carry automatic and semi-automatic machine guns. They routinely stop pedestrians on the street for questioning and conduct drug raids. When the Violent Crime Suppression Unit was first created, critics accused the Fresno police of establishing martial law. But Fries responds that since then, the constant shootings have stopped, and the drug dealers no longer congregate on

the corners at night.

Glick acknowledges that problems arise when SWAT roles change. "If the SWAT is not busy responding to initial barricades, people say they're lazy," he said. "Departments want to give them something to do. Some agencies have given them too much to do. Some are overused. We have evidence of smaller agencies [using their SWAT teams for] serving warrants, and that's not good." But Glick insists that proper training can stop the problems of overzealous SWAT teams before they start.

MILITARY TRAINING

But SWAT training also comes in for criticism, for problems with both quality and consistency. At most police departments, officers wishing to join a specialized unit must undergo dozens of hours of training. Entire teams participate in group training and refresher sessions throughout the year. The NTOA, the International Chiefs of Police, the American Society of Law Enforcement Trainers, and the International Association of Firearms Instructors conduct regular SWAT training exercises. State and big-city tactical teams, such as those in Los Angeles and Dallas, also offer training. Major gun manufacturers, such as Heckler & Koch and Smith & Wesson, are among the big vendors that provide training as well as equipment to SWAT teams. And the rapid growth of special units has given rise to hundreds of private training companies.

Some members of the SWAT industry question the quality of these private trainers. "The industry exploded in the early 1990s," says Philip Singleton, a law enforcement and special-operations consultant based in Warrenton, Va. "There are a lot of people who try to get into this because they know how to shoot. Anybody can set up a business and become a trainer. You don't have to get accredited. There's no watchdog. You'd be surprised. The bigger cities bring in these phonies and realize, 'Oh my God, what have we done?'"

But underqualified trainers are not half as controversial as the increasingly close relationship between SWAT teams and the Pentagon. The U.S. military has for decades been providing equipment and training to local law enforcement agencies, but in recent years, much of it has gone to SWAT teams. The Defense Logistics Agency, headquartered in Fort Belvoir, Va., runs the military's Law Enforcement Support Program, which gives surplus equipment to local police agencies for free. Police commonly call the program "1033," for the numbered section of the law authorizing it--the National Defense Authorization Act of 1997.

Between January 1997 and October 1999, the DLA processed 3.4 million 1033 orders from police departments. Had the equipment involved been sold, it would have brought more than \$727 million. Among the items transferred were 253 aircraft (including six- and seven-passenger airplanes, and UH-60 Blackhawk and UH-1 Huey helicopters), 7,856 M-16 rifles, 181 grenade launchers, 8,131

bulletproof helmets, and 1,161 pairs of night-vision goggles. Police officers can click on the Internet to scan available military items, or they can visit regional warehouses.

More than 11,000 federal and state law enforcement agencies from all 50 states plus U.S. territories participate in 1033. Each state has a 1033 coordinator, who is responsible for monitoring the transfers.

Police departments also receive assistance from a second, smaller Defense Department effort called the State and Local Law Enforcement Equipment Procurement Program, otherwise known as 1122, for its section of the National Defense Authorization Act of 1993. This program allows law enforcement agencies to purchase military equipment at reduced prices. By 1997, under this program, states had bought some \$3 million worth of equipment and supplies, including helmet shields, body armor, helicopter accessories, and sedans and trucks for use as pursuit vehicles.

In addition to providing surplus equipment, the military has taken an increasing role in training local SWAT teams. Joint Task Force Six, based at Biggs Army Airfield at Fort Bliss, Texas, coordinates the military's most systematic training for domestic law enforcement agencies. Defense Secretary Dick Cheney established JTF-6 in 1989, in an effort to provide federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies with anti-drug and border patrol support, mainly along the frontier with Mexico. Today, the task force consists of 170 soldiers, sailors, Marines, airmen, and civilian employees. The program dispatches mobile training teams, which conduct lessons in basic marksmanship, interdiction of narcotics, and threat assessment, among other things.

But military units outside of JTF-6 also train civilians. The U.S. Army Military Police School provides courses in field tactical police operations, marksmanship, narco-terrorism, personal protection, and special-reaction-team training. The Marine Corps lets local police practice at their bases and pistol ranges, and trains local law enforcement officers in land navigation and field survival. The corps's Chemical Biological Incident Response Force, a rapid-response unit designed for deployment after biological attack, trains with civilian law enforcement personnel. Some civilian special-operations police units participate in joint training sessions with Navy Seals and Army Rangers. A final tie to the military comes from the fact that many civilian SWAT team members are former members of the military's special-operations teams.

Such a give-and-take relationship makes many experts uneasy. They argue that this close contact undermines the separation between the country's civilian agencies and the military. And they doubt that police should carry the military's M-16--in essence, an automatic weapon that can spray bullets, as a machine gun does.

Sharing training and technology leads to a "shared mind-set," says Diane Cecilia Weber, author of "Warrior Cops: The Ominous Growth in Paramilitarism in American Police Departments," a report released last summer by the libertarian Cato Institute. The job of police officers is to keep the peace--but not by any means. They are expected to use minimum force, she says. The soldier, on the other hand, is an instrument of war and is trained to inflict maximum damage on enemy personnel. Paramilitarism threatens civil liberties, the well-being of all citizens, and constitutional norms, argues Weber.

Many members of the civilian law enforcement community disagree with Weber. They say the training they get from the military is not so significant, and the equipment is just equipment. More interesting, they say, is that recently they've seen the military increasingly learning from the police. "It was the civilian departments that first developed the tactics," says Klinger. "Since then, the military has learned and incorporated police approaches into the military."

The U.S. military is doing more and more peacekeeping and expects to wage more urban warfare in the future, so it has increasingly turned to domestic law enforcement for training, says Glick. "The military's role is changing every day.... [The armed services] can't accept casualty loss." They need to know how to use lethal munitions and also do crowd control, he said. SWAT consultant McCarthy agrees. "The military now comes to us," he says. "I've trained the military in riot control. But I don't see any articles on the politicization of the military."

Others say that local law enforcement occasionally needs the assistance of the military and that the value of the military's training can be exaggerated. "We do not encourage agencies to be trained by the military," Glick says. "But we do participate in joint training sessions. That doesn't mean that the military involvement drives the outcome of that incident. They simply bring a level of expertise that is not currently available in domestic law enforcement."

Members of the SWAT community say that high-tech military hand-me-down weaponry is also necessary. They say criminals are just as heavily armed as they are. Sgt. Doug Reid of the Los Angeles Police Department said: "Criminals today are becoming more and more sophisticated.... They're getting AK-47s and M-16s. Probably 70 percent of the time, our SWAT officers come across incidents that involve more than your standard handgun.... We use advanced weapons in order to keep the advantage."

Reid described a 1997 incident to make his point. In a North Hollywood neighborhood, two Los Angeles patrol officers faced off against two masked bank robbers wearing body armor and carrying AK-47s. Realizing within minutes that they were outgunned, the officers called for SWAT backup. An hour later, after more than 1,000 rounds of ammunition had been fired and 16 people had been injured, one of the robbers surrendered, and police shot the other one dead.

Upgraded guns are one thing--grenade launchers are another. Because of increasing media coverage of SWAT teams, police departments' use of military equipment, such as helicopters and small tanks, has been receiving more attention. Take the police department in sleepy Marion County in rural Florida. In 1997, CBS's 60 Minutes had a field day when it profiled the department's extensive collection of military equipment, which included 23 military helicopters, seven machine guns, a "bomb robot," and a personnel carrier. When asked why a relatively peaceful county like Marion needed such high-tech weapons and equipment, then-Sheriff Ken Ergle responded: "Well, with any county, with any state, with any nation, you always have to prepare for the threat of war.... My war is on the streets, fighting the criminals."

That warrior mentality is precisely what worries civil libertarians and lawyers such as Cameron Stewart, who is representing the Paz family in its suit against the El Monte police department over the Compton raid. Stewart argues that the SWAT team went far beyond its warrant and that the SWAT officer had no probable cause to shoot Mario Paz, who was unarmed and posed no threat to the police team.

"What we're learning about SWAT teams from the El Monte police department is that they go from county to county, targeting areas with disenfranchised people who don't have a voice," Stewart said. "SWAT activity has become more pervasive. They think they can get away with anything because nine times out of 10, people aren't going to come forward."

RELATED ARTICLE: FIVE COMMUNITIES, FIVE STORIES

In an effort to get beyond the rhetoric about SWAT teams, National Journal interviewed SWAT commanders across the country to find out what kinds of missions their teams are performing, where they receive their training, and what types of equipment they use.

Los ANGELES: THE MOTHER OF ALL SWATs

History: The Los Angeles Police Department created the country's first SWAT unit, in response to the city's 1965 riots in Watts. In 1971, the team became full-time. Today it consists of 67 people--one lieutenant, six sergeants, and 60 uniformed officers. Los Angeles has 3.7 million inhabitants.

Missions: The team is deployed about 150 times a year. More than 70 call-outs are in response to barricade or hostage situations, and about 80 involve the delivery of high-risk search warrants, mostly for narcotics, according to Sgt. Doug Reid, one of the seven supervising SWAT officers.

Training: The LAPD's training program is rigorous and serves as a model for many other cities and counties. The Los Angeles team also trains other special-

operations units around the country, including some military ones. Aspiring SWAT officers must have at least four years with the department before applying. They must then pass a daunting set of physical, psychological, academic, and shooting-proficiency tests. And only a select few make it through to final certification and the six- to eight-week basic SWAT school.

Over time, the LAPD has developed a close relationship with the Marine Corps. The corps lets the SWAT team use Camp Pendleton for practice; in return, the LAPD sets up city sites for the Marines' specialized urban warfare training.

Equipment: In addition to a bulletproof vest and helmets, each LAPD SWAT team member has a formidable arsenal of weapons: three .45-caliber semiautomatic pistols; an MP-5 9 mm submachine gun whose bullets can easily pierce walls; a Benelli 12-gauge shotgun; and a .223-caliber assault rifle, which is like the military's M-16. Other equipment used by the SWAT team includes sharpshooters' custom-built Robar .308-caliber rifles, tear gas, "flash-bang" explosives, bulletproof shields, a Vietnam-era helicopter, a bomb squad robot, and a \$250,000, 36-foot-long SWAT command van. Some of the equipment, such as the team's helicopter, gloves, goggles, and a small tank, came from military surplus.

ALBUQUERQUE: REORGANIZED AND REFORMED

History: The Albuquerque Police Department's SWAT unit began as a full-time anti-crime team in the late 1970s with fewer than eight officers. In 1986 it upgraded its training to become a SWAT team. Sgt. Terry Ward, acting supervisor of the SWAT team, said the demand was there. "The city was expanding, and the crack-cocaine business was booming. Officers were facing more critical incidents, and they needed to serve high-risk and narcotics search warrants. The department realized it couldn't just send regular officers out there." Today, with the city grown to more than 400,000 people, Albuquerque's full-time SWAT team consists of two squads with eight officers apiece, plus a separate crisis-negotiation team of four officers, two sergeants, and four psychologists.

Missions: The SWAT team is deployed 70 to 80 times a year, Ward says. Half of the incidents involve barricade or hostage situations. The other half are high-risk warrant deliveries. Ward said that since 1986, 99 percent of the city's SWAT incidents have been resolved without the use of force.

Training: Officers must undergo special physical, written, and oral tests. Once they join the team, they go through a 120-hour training course. The entire team trains together one day a week and receives periodic training from the U.S. Department of Energy's training academy, where federal officials conduct courses for their own SWAT teams.

Equipment: SWAT officers carry Colt .45-caliber pistols or M-4 assault rifles and

wear bulletproof helmets, body armor, and fire-retardant uniforms underneath. The unit has some military-supplied equipment, such as an armored vehicle, a helicopter, and flash-bang grenades.

Controversy: Last year, Albuquerque's team was forced to reorganize after the city was successfully sued by the family of a suicidal man who was shot and killed by a SWAT sniper. In 1995, the brother of 33-year-old Larry Harper called the police to report that Harper was threatening to kill himself. Nine SWAT team officers, a canine unit, and a single patrol officer located Harper in a picnic area. When Harper ran to the woods to hide, a SWAT-team sniper shot and killed him. The sniper said Harper was pointing a gun at the officers.

Partly as a result of that incident, the City Council in 1996 hired Samuel Walker, professor of criminal justice at the University of Nebraska (Omaha), to find out why police officers had fatally shot 30 people in the previous 10 years. Walker found that the fatal shootings were not the result of growing crime rates or racism, as he suspected. Rather, they were the result of the SWAT team's inability to deal with mentally ill criminals. "There were an extraordinary number of white guys having breakdowns with guns," Walker says. "And the SWAT team was negotiating confrontations with them upward, rather than downward. Clearly its values didn't involve peaceful resolution."

OGDEN, UTAH: SMALL BUT EFFECTIVE

History: Instead of operating their own SWAT units, many local police departments in small- to medium-size towns belong to multijurisdictional special-operations teams. The police department in Ogden, Utah, a town of 66,000 people, participates in a 17-jurisdiction team, the Ogden/Metro SWAT Team, which has been nationally recognized for its expertise and success. The team consists of 22 tactical officers and six technicians.

Missions: The team deploys two or three times a month. Lt. Randy Watt, commander of the Ogden/Metro SWAT, says one-third of the calls are for high-risk warrant deliveries, one-third for barricade situations, and the other third for fugitive apprehensions.

In 1991, for example, a suspect took one of Ogden's narcotics officers hostage. Two SWAT members stormed the hotel room where he was staying. Within three seconds, 17 rounds were fired, the suspect was killed, and the officer was rescued.

The SWAT team has also succeeded in apprehending fugitives. Several years ago, the team was deployed to capture suspects in an armed robbery in Portland, Ore. The suspects had hopped on a train, which was scheduled to stop in Ogden. In an operation that seems more like a scene from a movie than real life, the officers lay in wait near the tracks, pulled themselves onto the moving train, then combed it until they found and apprehended the suspects.

Training: An officer who applies must pass a series of physical, stress, written, and oral tests, followed by a weeklong basic training course described as "hell week." After that, the candidate is placed on the team for a six-month probationary period. The team has cross-trained with Navy SEALs in weapons use and undergone specialized hostage-rescue sessions with the Army's highly secretive Delta Force. Ogden SWAT officers have also trained with the LAPD and the Marine Corps. Watt said his team includes a former special-forces soldier and two former Army Rangers.

Equipment: Member agencies provide each team member with the following equipment: an armored vest, state-of-the-art gas mask, a tactical radio headset, training and duty ammunition, and a Glock 22 or 23 .40-caliber pistol. The Ogden/Metro SWAT Team provides the officer with a ballistic helmet with harness, Colt 9 mm submachine gun, Remington 12-gauge tactical shotgun, a marksman rifle (such as a .223-caliber or .308-caliber long-barreled rifle) with accessories, tactical explosives, and a Motorola radio set. Watt says the team recently received funding for a \$394,000 armored vehicle. But, unlike many other SWAT teams, Ogden/Metro is not buying its vehicle through the Pentagon's surplus program. In fact, Watt says the military-surplus program provides little assistance to local departments such as his. "It's only helpful for federal law enforcement agencies," Watt says. "They have first shot at the property and specialized equipment. We don't get it." As a result, Watt buys from private manufacturers.

NORTHERN ILLINOIS: STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

History: The Northern Illinois Police Alarm System Emergency Service Team is the largest multijurisdictional SWAT team in the country. The 63 NIPASEST officers come from 40 communities, which together total about a million residents in the Chicago metropolitan area. Founded in 1987, the team was initially trained by members of the Houston SWAT team. Deputy Chief Kevin Tracz of the Deerfield, Ill., Police Department says the EST had a rocky beginning, "It took us a while to become mature and effective," says Tracz. "We weren't solid until our third or fourth year." Yet departments were drawn to the multijurisdictional SWAT team because it was cheaper, he says. "Departments that had already had SWAT teams dropped theirs and joined."

Missions: Tracz says the NIPASEST is deployed about 20 times a year. A few missions are tot hostage situations or dignitary protection, 60 percent are in response to barricade situations, and 25 percent involve warrant deliveries. He says the team serves warrants in situations involving suspected gang members, large amounts of weapons, pit bull dogs, or drugs. And 99 percent of its barricade situations arise from domestic disputes. "Typically, spouses are fighting, alcohol is involved, someone pulls a gun, the wife calls 911," he says.

Training: Officers must pass a physical exam and fitness test; an oral exam on the

law, procedures, and tactics; handgun qualification; a stress test; and a psychological examination. Officers who succeed in all those areas must also pass an 80-hour basic SWAT course. In addition, they receive military instruction from the Marine Corps's Scout/Sniper School and the Pentagon's counter-narcotics operations school.

Equipment: Team members wear black or camouflage uniforms and helmets, tactical armored vests, and bulletproof face shields. Each carries a duty pistol as well as an MP-5 submachine gun. Some use a Colt M-4 .223-caliber shoulder rifle or M16/AR-15 assault rifle. Marksmen use custom-made Remington-action .308-caliber rifles. Other, heavier weapons, such as grenade launchers and a semiautomatic Mossberg breaching shotgun, are also available.

The Illinois team gets some equipment from the military. "We're starting to get a lot of surplus military equipment at the Great Lakes Naval Base in North Chicago," Tracz says. "They're almost giving stuff away. You can't beat their prices." But most of the surplus equipment is clothing and office equipment. And besides, "unless you're near a big military base, you have problems getting equipment. Departments near bigger, more active bases are able to get more equipment because those bases have more surplus." The team just finished paying for its military-surplus mobile command post.

CULVER CITY, CALIF.: NO SWAT, NO SWEAT

Unlike the other communities profiled, Culver City, Calif., a Los Angeles suburb of more than 38,000 people next door to Los Angeles International Airport, has chosen not to have a SWAT team. Regular uniformed patrol units from its force of 121 officers respond to almost all major incidents that arise, except for hostage situations, said Lt. Thomas Gabor, a police spokesman. Only a handful of times has the department requested the assistance of the Los Angeles County SWAT team. For example, close to five years ago, three people staged an early-morning burglary in one of the city's larger shopping malls. After his local police officers responded to the initial call, Gabor, who was watch commander at the time, decided to call in the county SWAT team to seal off and search the building. Eventually all three suspects were apprehended--one in a crawlspace above the ceiling. The "SWAT team did a great job," Gabor says.

Although he acknowledges that small departments like his sometimes need SWAT team assistance, Gabor insists that they do not need their own SWAT teams. A SWAT team is extremely costly, not only for its weapons and training, but in terms of high liability insurance premiums and morale problems, says Gabor, who has served in the city's police department for 23 years. "Anything but the finest quality, full-time SWAT team is likely to open the department up for liability suits.... When a small police department devotes a small fortune to training a SWAT unit, there's internal pressure to use that team for situations that patrol units can handle." To make matters worse, he says, SWAT teams are

elitist: "They treat regular patrol officers like second-class citizens."

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